



# LINCOLN cheers his SICK BOY



T WAS my good fortune to see something of Abraham Lincoln when he was a tender father mourning for his dead son and watching with anxious care at the bedside of the youngest child. We had seen Mr. Lincoln's inauguration, had studied the pale, grave face while waiting in the Senate chamber fronting the assembled Congress and crowded galleries. We smiled at his awkward attempts to dispose of the tall silk hat which was greasy in the way. Later, on the east portico, when we saw him take the oath of office and pronounce the inaugural address, it is part of the history of the day that Stephen A. Douglas held that troublesome hat! But the picture my memory holds most clearly and with the most reverence is in the homely setting of a child's sick-room.

It was in February, 1862, a time of darkness and perplexity for the Union. Mrs. Lincoln had entertained a



*Mrs. Lucas Richards, the author of the following recollections, died in 1913. At Moria Hall, of Washington, she served during the war between the States in the capacity of an army nurse. Just before going into service she spent two weeks at the Executive Mansion taking care of Tad Lincoln while he was ill.*

large party of invited guests—perhaps by the advice of mistaken friends, perhaps to mark the first Winter in the White House, or to welcome distinguished strangers visiting in Washington. A storm of indignant criticism was aroused in the North by this unprecedented gaiety in the face of the nation's distress. On the very evening of this entertainment Willie Lincoln, a lad of ten or twelve, fell sick. After a short illness he died, but not before his younger brother, Tad, had also contracted the fever. At this crisis Mr. Lincoln applied to Miss Dix, asking if a woman could be spared to help them for a short time.

I was a young woman in the first flush of enthusiastic devotion to the Union cause. With other Washington ladies I had made handkerchiefs and bawls and Volunteers, in the United States Patent Office. Here we worked till the first confusion was reduced to order, and now the more systematic work was being carried forward by Miss Dix's appointed nurses. I was, however, still an interested visitor, and I had signified to Miss Dix my readiness to fill any emergency call if desired. She appeared before me one evening without warning. She said: "My dear, I have especial service for you tonight, and will wait for you to be ready."

This was her manner. She moved rapidly and noiselessly, spoke directly, her beautiful blue eyes looking straight at one, and in her clear tone there was no mistaking her meaning. When we were seated in the waiting carriage she made her next remark, saying: "I am taking you to the President's."

I exclaimed and objected. She said, "It is your duty to go there as much as to take care of a soldier boy. Mr. Lincoln has asked for our help. Willie died this morning,

Concluded on page 52

# LINCOLN AND HIS SICK BOY



## The nursing mother

**H**EALTH weaves a fairy charm about babyhood. It touches the starlike eyes with fresh beauty; it is the essence of that whiff of baby-sweetness that rises from the warm little bundle; it is the sole inspiration of those gurgly little noises born in the tiny throat.

With a keen yearning for baby's welfare, the wise mother watches her own health. She knows that her physical condition registers its effect upon baby through the milk.

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Tad is ill, and Mrs. Lincoln is worn out and ill, too."

On arriving at the White House we went directly to Mrs. Lincoln's room, and Miss Dix presented me to her. And here was Mr. Lincoln standing before an open fire, his hands behind him and his tall, gaunt figure looming up to the center of the room. Miss Dix, introducing me, said: "You may feel she is too young to be trusted with your sick boy, but you will find her reliable."

I looked up at him, possibly with an appeal for a fair trial, for he approached me so kindly. Extending both hands to me, he said: "Well, all I can say is I hope she will turn to right away, for we need the help."

I looked up into that care-worn, homely face and felt all my heart go out to him. Those "tender, true, pathetic eyes" looked into the deep recesses, and I was ready to confide to him the dearest secrets of my life.

**T**AD was a patient, uncomplaining little man in his sickness. The fever was running its course favorably, and his faculties were gratified if possible. He was always content and happy in his father's presence, or watching for his return if absent. The wonder-greynow the busy man found so much time to spend with the boy, and how the sad heart brought so much cheer. If the face was care-worn and clouded at the door, Tad did not see it; there was always a smile for him and a cheery word. "How's the boy?"

Late in the evening he would come, sometimes after midnight, after getting last advices from the front. If Tad were awake, he gave me some of the items from the front, but usually all was quiet for patient and nurse, with promise of rest for both. Yet he insisted on sending me off for sleep and staying himself. "For I can lie down here with the boy," he would say.

I remember few conveniences in the sick-room—only the necessities—and in comparison with the necessities of to-day it was truly simple. Mr. Lincoln made light of inconveniences with great philosophy. One night Tad was restless and wanted some mineral water. Mr. Lincoln had a small bottle, but to get it opened was the puzzle. He had no corkscrew in his pocket, not even a jack-knife, I fancy, and he seemed not to know where to look for anything of his kind. (The picture of that great man helpless with the small bottle is to be remembered.)

I found in my pocket a small pair of scissors, which I handed him, saying if that would help. He seized it, saying: "Why yes, Miss Maria, it's just the thing!"

Then, the cork being out, another trouble arose—only one tumbler, and that half full of water. He looked at it ruefully; said: "That's too much water. What shall I do with it?" He motioned to throw it on the fire, but as it with a happy thought desisted, and said: "I guess I'll drink it."

One morning Mr. Lincoln said: "Now pa has some writing to do to-day. Shall he bring it here where the boy is lying?"

"Oh, yes!" said Tad with eagerness. So Mr. Lincoln himself brought a round table, a suitable chair, and as if a necessary article, together with an armful of army commissions to be signed. He placed himself in exactly the proper position for Tad's convenience, and wrote with pen and smile upon the boy. And so he signed his name for hours till the commissions were transferred one by one to the floor.

**A**S THE last was laid with deliberate satisfaction on top of the pile I asked if he would kindly write that name once for me.

I taking the sheet of paper I held out, he said: "Certainly, Miss Maria," and as he wrote he said: "When I write my name for the public, I have to sign it Abraham Lincoln, but I like best the A. Lincoln, so I write it that way for you."

Perceiving also that I held a letter to be mailed, he said: "Shall I frank your letter, too?" Which he did, to the pleasant surprise of my friend and the wonder of the village postmaster who received the letter in his post-office.

Mrs. Lincoln, being worn out and prostrated by the illness and death of Willie, all responsibility for family affairs seemed to rest on Mr. Lincoln, already burdened shoulders. The only servant who came to

Mrs. Lincoln's room was "Aunt Mary," a dear old Kentucky mammy from Mrs. Lincoln's old home, who looked upon Tad as the darling of her heart.

I fancy it was a blaphazard game to get the President to find time for visiting with any regularity. While the guests remained, the dining hours was as usual, and I dined with the family, while "Aunt Mary" took my place in the sick-room.

The table-talk was naturally of current events and of the difficulties encountered in the first days of the war, when all was confusion and the Government constantly huffed by resignations or desertions of officers whose sympathies were with the South. In our social life of the city we had met this element most unexpectedly, and some dear associations were thus rudely broken up; yet I was hardly prepared to hear of the defection in high places. I can remember only snatches of the talk; it was interrupted by messengers. Once the private secretary came and held a short parley with the President. When he spoke of a message from the House, Mr. Lincoln excused himself, saying: "I suppose I must go."

It was the young man, John Hay, whom the President chose in the face of protest against his youth and inexperience.

The talk was resumed on Mr. Lincoln's return, and he held a short parley at the resignation of Commodore Buchanan at the Navy Yard. He alluded to the pleasant social intercourse of their families and his great surprise at the resignation, adding: "There, So-and-So leaves the Navy Yard at the mercy of the South. If they had only known it, they could have come up the river to take possession, and we could not have prevented it."

He dwelt upon the time when the capital was cut off from the North through Baltimore and held a short parley with the messenger to Baltimore; so much seemed to depend on getting the right man. He said: "Seward was here and Scott was here, and I was here, and Colonel B. and others" (names I do not recall). "At last we decided upon Colonel B. and, to be honest and true, I think the best thing we could do was to bring him here, so that Scott should give him the whole thing."

**T**HE colonel returned with Mr. Seward, received instructions and orders from General Scott, and asked for a half-hour to prepare for leaving. At the end of the half-hour he returned, to whom his commission in the United States Army, as he could not fight against the South!

At length Mr. Lincoln, said: "We did not know which way to look, or who could be trusted."

The North was indignant and clamorous to have such things punished. The papers said: "They are traitors; why don't you bang them?"

"True," mused Mr. Lincoln, "they ought to be hung—but then—Well, you see, we could not do that."

The dinner was ended, and we waited for the host to move. He had apparently forgotten us, as he sat at the table with his hands behind him, and his head bowed. Presently in a low, earnest tone he said, as if summing up the whole matter: "I do not know how the ever got through those days without the help of Almighty God."

This scene abides with me, a deep conviction of the man's abiding trust in God.

**T**HE days of my ministrations ended when Mrs. Pomeroy could be spared from her wards, and she came to give better care, no know how the ever got through those days without the help of Almighty God.

He was gradually improving, and in time recovered, to be again the pet and the torment of the household. He was with his father every possible moment, absent from him he was concocting every possible bit of mischief. He was a genuine, true-hearted, generous boy. Stories were told of his charity—especially how he did, to the pleasant surprise of the barfoot boys he met, till his mother in despair absolutely forbade it. He argued that they get me some more, and I guess you can buy me some more, and I'm so sorry for them."

After his father's death he said: "If pa had got into no more wars, he would have forgiven me, but he forgave everybody."